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Chair: Mr. Haniff ..... (Malaysia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 27: Social development (*continued*)

(a) Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (*continued*) (A/66/124 and 226)

(b) Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*) (A/66/61-E/2011/3, A/66/62-E/2011/4, A/66/121, 128, 129 and 136)

(c) Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing (*continued*) (A/66/173)

1. **Ms. Morgan** (Mexico) said that Mexico, having established the necessary inclusive and transparent public policies, was making progress in complying with its international commitments in the area of social development. Despite the global financial crisis, significant progress had been made in the health-care sector, and with regard to nutrition, education and housing. Under the Social Development Act, the budget allocated to social development programmes increased each year, a policy that responded, among other factors, to the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (A/66/124).

2. Mexico believed in the importance of inclusiveness in social policies and trusted that, during its current session, the General Assembly would decide to convene a high-level meeting to analyse strategies to ensure that the human rights of people with disabilities were taken into account in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

3. **Ms. Ochoa** (Mexico), speaking as a youth delegate, said that Mexico welcomed the full incorporation of youth into the discussion of priority issues of the United Nations. At the national level, it had implemented programmes and initiatives to promote social participation, especially by young people, focused on the principal elements of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

4. Two programmes were particularly important, that of youth delegates, which had been implemented in Mexico for the last seven years, and a programme of national and international volunteers that sought to promote a culture of solidarity while contributing to national social cohesion. In that regard, on 31 October 2011, Mexico would be sponsoring a forum to reflect on voluntary work which would examine the recommendations arising from the regional consultations carried out under the sponsorship of the United Nations Volunteers programme.

5. **Mr. Tagle** (Chile) said that the persistence of the economic and financial turmoil and the uncertainty about when it would end had affected the capacity of countries to adopt relevant measures and maintain the level of social protection achieved. That volatility, together with the high cost of food had exacerbated the situation, reducing available income and propelling poverty to new heights. In that context, official development assistance (ODA) was more important than ever, and the international financial institutions should eliminate the conditionality that affected the social programmes of countries receiving technical and financial assistance.

6. Chile, a medium-income country, had made significant efforts to achieve sustainable, stable and inclusive development, and the measures adopted in the past had helped it weather the external crises. The economy was continuing to grow and the level of unemployment was low, while public policies had been established to increase investment in social development. Nevertheless, that situation would not continue forever, especially if the climate of uncertainty persisted for much longer.

7. In addition to consolidating democracy and promoting an open economy and efficient policies to combat poverty and create greater equality of opportunities, the emerging countries needed to consider new ways of ensuring development, such as investing in science and technology and promoting innovation and entrepreneurship. But, above all, investment was required in education and training, which was the path to social mobility and new social standards.

8. The current crisis was proving once again that economic growth alone was not enough and that social development and the three pillars of Copenhagen — poverty eradication, full employment and social

integration — must be part of the development model. In that context, the United Nations system should explore how Governments social policies could be complemented by the efforts of the private sector, because the latter was a key element in generating full and productive employment and decent work.

9. **Ms. Aitimova** (Kazakhstan) said that the internationally agreed decisions and recommendations on social development should be implemented promptly and effectively in order to mitigate the negative impact of the continuing economic, financial and social crisis. For its part, Kazakhstan had established a national fund to reduce the dependence of its economy on external factors and, in 2011, had launched a new inclusive social policy.

10. Her country was endeavouring to provide productive employment and decent work as a means of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, particularly by increasing the efficiency of the labour market, providing retraining for the unemployed and opportunities for the self-employed. Special attention was being paid to young people, who tended to suffer disproportionately from underemployment and low wages. Recognizing the vital importance of social services, financing for health care had been increased significantly, and special programmes were being implemented for vulnerable groups with a view to increasing life expectancy. Kazakhstan was committed to meeting its social obligations fully despite the current situation.

11. Lastly, greater coherence was required in achieving the objectives of the United Nations system. Initiatives should be more closely coordinated with national Governments, the private sector, non-governmental partners and academia. Kazakhstan also encouraged the development of a long-term equity-oriented approach with due attention to the needs of the most vulnerable.

12. **Ms. Dunlop** (Brazil), reiterating her country's strong commitment to the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, said that it had been undertaking initiatives to strengthen all three dimensions of social development. Recently a complete poverty eradication strategy had been launched to increase the income of vulnerable groups and improve their living conditions. Brazil had one of the largest populations of young people in the world and had been working with other countries in the region to improve the well-being of Latin American youth, an effort that included their incorporation into the decision-making processes related to the major challenges facing their respective societies.

13. The number of older persons in Brazil was increasing and, to meet the challenge, new legislation and public policies were being implemented as regards health care, retirement pensions and subsistence payments. Her country had also been working with its partners in Latin America and the Caribbean to implement the framework set out by the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. In that regard, the 2007 Brasília Declaration urged that a special rapporteur should be designated to monitor and promote the rights of older people, and that consultations should be held with a view to elaborating a binding international instrument on the matter.

14. Brazil had made significant progress in the protection of the rights of people with disabilities through domestic legislation and the implementation of the relevant international treaties. Particular attention had been given to assuring their personal dignity, social and economic inclusion, and access to public services, as well as to combating discrimination. Regarding children and adolescents with special needs, her country joined other Member States in endorsing the proposal to adopt a binding instrument on limitations and exceptions to copyright in order to provide disabled people with broader access to intellectual and educational material.

15. Lastly, Brazil and Japan would submit a draft resolution recognizing that volunteerism was an important component of any development or humanitarian strategy. International cooperation, including its South-South dimension, had a critical role to play in promoting opportunities for social inclusion.

16. **Mr. Rakovskiy** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation supported the "global partnership" concept in the context of implementing the decisions of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly. The lead role in coordinating international activities related to ageing, youth, the family and persons with disabilities clearly belonged to the Commission for Social Development.

17. Measures had been taken by the Russian Federation to address the economic crisis through employment support, enhanced professional training

for college students which took greater account of market demands, job creation through incentives for small and medium-sized businesses and employment for persons with disabilities. Over the past year, unemployment had been reduced from 9.4 per cent to 7.2 per cent, and the number of people living in poverty had not increased.

18. The Russian Federation supported efforts by the International Labour Organization to provide employment and social guarantees during the crisis. Prime Minister Putin had recently announced plans for the Russian Federation to host an international high-level conference in 2012 on achieving the Decent Work Agenda objectives. A government programme of social support for vulnerable groups was currently in its second year. Medical care for the elderly was being enhanced, and, as part of a massive pension reform, pensions had gone up 45 per cent in 2010. By the end of 2011, pensions would increase by another 10 per cent. In 2012, they would grow by 11 per cent.

19. Social policy also included efforts to guarantee equal rights and freedoms for persons with disabilities. The Russian Federation had signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008, and as ratification approached, work to ensure equal opportunities in employment, inclusive education, social adaptation and rehabilitation and to enhance physical access to facilities for persons with disabilities was ongoing. Lastly, youth policy in the Russian Federation focused on ensuring stable employment, efforts to assist young people in reaching their professional and creative potential, and promotion of moral values, healthy lifestyles, civic responsibility, peace and international understanding.

20. **Ms. Saebønes** (Norway) said that, even though great efforts had been made to raise awareness of the need to include people with disabilities in all programmes and development initiatives, little had been achieved. Absence of action would lead to disabled people remaining illiterate, excluded from the labour market and living in poverty. Urgent measures were required to provide them with adequate access to education and health care.

21. Accessibility was of vital importance for an inclusive society. Figures revealed that nothing was more cost-efficient than the inclusion of everyone in society, and a society that emphasized education and work for everyone would prosper. Recent data pointed out that an equity-focused approach to poverty reduction could be more effective than a general approach, especially in low-income, high-mortality countries where the disability of one person would result in the poverty of the whole family.

22. A systematic and holistic approach was required both within the United Nations system and at the country level to ensure basic education and access to health care for the millions of children with disabilities. Focus on the issue could be increased by including the rights of those children in the hearings under the Human Rights Council's universal periodic review. Moreover the situation of children with disabilities was closely linked to women's rights and gender equality; consequently, measures to improve the conditions of both groups would be mutually reinforcing.

23. **Ms. Midtgarden** (Norway), speaking as a youth delegate, said that countries should take advantage of the enormous potential represented by young people. Currently, participation was often granted only at a superficial level, where young people's contributions did not affect structural policy decisions. However, while young people had proved that they were able to make substantive contributions to development, full realization of the potential of youth required support from national Governments and the international community. Investing in the education and empowerment of young people was one of the safest long-term investments.

24. Young people had a right to be involved in decision-making as peers, and all Member States should act upon their promises by continuing to implement and respect the World Programme of Action for Youth, enabling children and adolescents to educate and empower themselves as key stakeholders in both the planning and the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

25. **Mr. Felix** (Switzerland), speaking as a youth delegate, said that the full and constructive participation of youth as equal partners was not merely a political commitment, and called for recognition of their right to take part in decision-making at all levels, making use of their knowledge and experience and considering them as key agents in society, able to make an important contribution to their country's development. Giving young people an opportunity to participate in decision-making contributed to their

development and allowed them to contribute to the development of society.

26. However, participation must be accompanied by empowerment, which called for education to help the young integrate into social and professional life and exercise their citizenship. In that regard, youth organizations and volunteerism were a dynamic force for social integration and active citizenship and could become a strategy to combat social problems such as drug use and youth crime.

27. **Mr. Cabactulan** (Philippines) said that the recent global crises, which had affected every country and, above all, the most vulnerable sectors, had caused significant setbacks in the progress made towards achieving the internationally agreed development goals. Recovery was expected to be slow, but meanwhile providing for the basic needs of the people, especially the disadvantaged and most vulnerable, could not wait.

28. Social development was an integral part of the Philippine national development agenda. The 2011-2016 Development Plan consisted of three broad strategies to ensure high and sustained economic growth; equal access to development opportunities for all, and responsive social safety nets, with good governance and anti-corruption as overarching themes. Policies had also been put in place to develop a more coherent social protection system, particularly in the areas of education and health, and a more effective labour market programme.

29. The most productive policies and investments were those that empowered people to maximize their capacities, resources and opportunities. Consequently, the Government strongly supported measures to empower vulnerable groups in order to integrate them into society. However, national efforts needed to be complemented by regional and international actions, and the Philippines emphasized the importance of inclusive bilateral, regional and multilateral development cooperation. Lastly, the Philippines, together with the United Republic of Tanzania, would be submitting a draft resolution on achieving the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities, a group that remained largely invisible in the development processes. A high-level meeting in 2012 would provide the opportunity to consider a global strategy towards 2015 and beyond.

30. **Ms. Abubakar** (Libya), stressing the need to intensify efforts to mitigate the negative impact of the global crisis, particularly on developing countries, said that the political developments in her country since the 17 February revolution aimed at establishing a just, democratic system, improving living standards and ensuring the economic welfare of all Libyans. The National Transitional Council, the only legitimate representative of the Libyan people, was committed to integrating the needs of the young into its development plans. Barred from decision-making under the previous regime, the youth of the new Libya were prepared to cooperate with their counterparts from around the world, to learn from their experiences, and to contribute actively to different regional and international activities on youth advancement and political and social participation.

31. Libyan women had been engaged in their country's struggle for freedom alongside their brothers from the opening salvos of the revolution and were striving to strengthen their active participation in economic development and political decision-making. Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women was one of the top priorities of the new Libyan State, which would work to enshrine women's rights and freedoms in national legislation, improve gender relations and enact just and non-discriminatory personal status laws, in addition to granting opportunities in all fields.

32. As an integral part of society, persons with disabilities enjoyed all basic human rights guaranteed under national legislation and international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which her country had signed in 2008 and intended to ratify once an elected Government was formed. The new Libyan leadership would continue to work to improve the performance of various economic and social institutions, ensure fair income distribution, promote the rule of law and adopt legislative measures that tied income to living needs and that provided income, health care and social services to persons cut off from their livelihoods, including the incapacitated, the orphaned, the widowed and the elderly.

33. The challenges faced by the Libyan people in its intense effort to build a new Libya were significant. Despite the high price her country had paid for liberation from the Qadhafi regime in terms of casualties and devastated infrastructure, the National

Transitional Council was committed to establishing a prosperous society based on the values of equality, social justice and the rule of law.

34. **Mr. Kanda** (Ghana) said that, prior to the recent crises, a number of developing countries had been successfully implementing poverty reduction strategies, while social protection initiatives had been developed extensively in Africa. It was paradoxical that, at a time when the need to expand social protection was greatest, developing countries were faced with a restrictive financial environment. Developing countries needed to have policy space to enable them to pursue counter-cyclical policies to cushion the budgetary impact of the crisis.

35. Ghana continued to honour its commitment to social development and had established a cross-sectoral team composed of government, civil society and its development partners to coordinate social protection and poverty reduction strategies. It had also implemented policies to benefit people with disabilities, youth and older persons. However, most social protection programmes remained donor-driven, making them difficult to sustain in the medium to long term.

36. The current economic crisis should encourage the development of new ways to protect the poor and institutionalize social protection in developing countries, addressing the priority needs of the most vulnerable groups. Programmes were called for that transcended national boundaries through shared experiences and best practices. Development partners should support efforts to ensure sufficient fiscal space for the required budgetary reallocations, and the international financial institutions should allow developing countries to establish policies that supported national social protection strategies. Lastly, developing countries needed to involve their private sectors and civil society to address the immediate needs of the poor, as well as to invest in growth and stabilization packages.

37. **Mr. Núñez Mosquera** (Cuba) said that the international economic and political order continued to be profoundly unfair and unsustainable and that the South suffered from the distortions in a global economic order that excluded their legitimate interests. Moreover, those most affected were the workers, the unemployed, the migrants and the poor of the countries that were least responsible for the current global crises.

38. The breach between rich and poor was increasing, while the world continued to invest vast amounts in military expenses and waste enormous sums on illegal drugs. The situation could be partially offset if the industrialized countries complied with their commitment to provide 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product in official development assistance and increased international cooperation.

39. Cuba had achieved almost all its Millennium Development Goals. Since the revolution, it had built a society based on social justice and solidarity, despite the trade embargo imposed by the United States Government, and the impact of several powerful hurricanes and the current global crises. It had invested heavily in health care and education, social security and assistance, and scientific and technological research. In addition, Cuba had shared its resources with other Third World nations through South-South cooperation. Much could be accomplished to ensure the right to development of millions of persons with relatively few resources, if the political will existed in the countries of the developed world.

40. **Mr. Janssen** (Netherlands), speaking as a youth delegate, said that, through the new social media, young people were becoming a globally interconnected generation. True interconnectedness was about discovering that the similarities between peers in the North and South were greater than their differences. It forced young people to acknowledge each other's humanity, to accept their responsibilities towards each other and the planet, and to consider the consequences that their actions had for others. In addition, nowadays young people were more informed about world events, the actions that their Governments were taking and the discussions taking place within the United Nations.

41. His country's youth organizations had been closely watching the recent High-level Meeting on Youth, and, while they noted the engagement of many missions and United Nations agencies, they also saw the lack of youth participation in the youth resolutions and during the International Year of Youth. The Internet had made informed reports on the global situation accessible to all, and young people were aware of the real tragedies, injustice and wasted potential of youth that lay behind the figures. Interconnectedness allowed youth to unite to demand that their Governments start to act and give priority to young people, by allowing them to participate and taking their perspective into account. Specifically,

Member States should consider establishing dialogue between employers and educational establishments to ensure that the skills taught matched those required by the labour market.

42. **Ms. Johansson** (Sweden), speaking as a youth delegate, said that she considered herself privileged. Although deaf from birth, she had been given great opportunities while growing up. She had been educated in sign language, and youth disability organizations had worked to ensure her a life free from discrimination. However, in general, young people with disabilities suffered from multiple forms of discrimination, particularly in the areas of education and employment. Education was a key factor for the creation of equal opportunities and it was crucial that appropriate access be provided.

43. Discrimination should be fought by raising awareness about different needs. Stereotypes formed obstacles and limited the possibilities of those who did not conform to the norm; transforming the norms to create a more inclusive society would benefit everyone. In addition to a youth perspective, Governments should adopt a disability perspective in the decision-making processes, in order to ensure participation for all.

44. In times of economic crisis, the most vulnerable groups were always the most severely affected. However, in such times, it was more important than ever to ensure that internationally agreed goals were fully achieved. Across the globe, young people had been giving vent to their frustration in the face of rising unemployment and lack of opportunities. It was time to grant them real political participation and influence, because political representation and full and equal participation were the cornerstones of a democratic and inclusive society.

45. **Mr. Ja'afari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the radical changes in his Government's approach to development since early 2011, informed by a genuinely reform-minded vision, would lead to the formulation of comprehensive social and economic development policies and institutional evolution. The Syrian Arab Republic had adopted a number of legislative decrees on modernizing national development and social assistance funds in different governorates, to the economic, social, health and educational benefit of those receiving help, particularly small groups. It had also hosted for the second year running the second international conference on development in May 2011.

46. It was unfortunate that the reports of the Secretary-General on social development had failed to mention the adverse impact of Israeli occupation and violence on the social development of Arab lands in the region. The Committee should address the disabilities caused by the use of weapons with long-term effects on life, such as cluster munitions and mines. The international community should also redouble its efforts to eliminate all obstacles preventing peoples living under foreign occupation from exercising their right to social development, in particular their right to self-determination.

47. **Mr. Chuquihuara** (Peru) said that, throughout the world, and particularly in developing countries, extreme poverty, and lack of access to basic services, education and employment rendered large sectors of the population vulnerable and gave rise to significant inequality. Economic growth did not guarantee social development, and developing countries needed to transform the growth that they had achieved into substantial improvements in the quality of life of their people, through public policies promoting social inclusion for all.

48. Stable democracy was an essential element of sustainable development and social inclusion. Furthermore, a stable economic and political climate was necessary for the economic growth that made investment and employment generation possible. Consequently, Peru was developing its economic and social policies jointly in order to overcome social and geographical gaps and provide vulnerable groups with market access and development. The new Government believed that an inclusive society called for a growth model that incorporated social inclusion designed to provide equal access to basic services and decent employment. Accordingly, it had established a Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion and was elaborating specific public policies and projects.

49. Peru was also implementing national programmes to ensure the integral development and the full inclusion of its Andean, Amazonian and Afro-descendant peoples into the social, political and economic life of the country, while respecting their specific cultural identity, and according special attention to children, women and older people.

50. While the State had primary responsibility for promoting national inclusion policies, a favourable international environment was required to ensure their

successful implementation. Thus, international cooperation helped make the State's actions more effective, and Member States, the United Nations system, and international financial institutions should increase their cooperation to support the relevant national policies in developing countries.

51. **Mr. Al-Awadhi** (Yemen) said that his country had been among the first to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and had enacted legislation to ensure the rights of this segment of the population. It had also established a number of institutions to provide the disabled with training and rehabilitation in order to integrate them into society.

52. Yemen believed that youth were the cornerstone of the nation and the basis for development efforts. The Government had therefore provided support to young people in areas such as sports and cultural activities and had enacted enabling legislation, implemented skills-development projects, and established the President's award for youth in different fields. With regard to older persons, special care centres had been established together with a fund for social assistance. In 2007, the Government had issued its first report on older persons and was contributing to the collective discussion of issues related to that sector and its needs.

53. The Arab peoples under Israeli occupation were still suffering from the violation of all their fundamental rights, especially in the social and economic fields, which made it incumbent on the international community to put an end to the occupation and ensure the right of the Arab peoples to live in peace. Lastly, Yemen welcomed the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014 and reiterated its commitment to implementing the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development.

54. **Mr. Saulo** (Australia) said that he was the first Aboriginal to be appointed Youth Ambassador, which attested to the opportunities available in Australia, a country that invested in human potential and supported individual growth and community development. His generation believed that its future was defined by a sense of mutual responsibility and an inherent sense of a global community based on relationships and accountability.

55. As Youth Ambassador, he had been able to travel throughout Australia and acquire first-hand knowledge of the challenges that continued to face people with disabilities, the poor, and those struggling with the impact of drugs, alcohol and cultural degradation. His focus had been on health, education, human rights and indigenous affairs, and his journey had highlighted that education was the common thread binding those areas.

56. Fortunately, Australia's Government and its youth shared a common vision, which was reflected in the commitments set out in the National Strategy for Young Australians. The strategy identified education as the basis for the development of the country's future leaders and, on that basis, steps were being taken to support diverse learning styles, including formal, informal, alternative and bilingual education.

57. His country also focused on supporting education programmes throughout the world, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. In a world that was becoming increasingly interconnected through modern technology, young people should consider themselves global citizens, responsible for the welfare of their peers, because world events tended to have national repercussions.

58. Australia was considering the appointment of a national children's commissioner to set the strategic direction for youth-based policy development and monitoring. The establishment of such a post in every country would be an important step towards ensuring that the voices of young people were heard and respected and that youth services were provided with adequate resources.

59. **Mr. Deutinger** (Germany), speaking as a youth delegate, said that recent meetings with young Germans had identified three priorities that they would like the United Nations to focus on. The first, youth participation, meant involving young people in the entire decision-making process, beginning with the definition of relevant issues and ending with the implementation and evaluation of real policies. The youth participation component of the World Programme of Action for Youth lacked clear indicators for measuring success or failure; also, a legal framework defining the co-decision process needed to be established. In Germany, youth-led organizations played a crucial role as a bridge between young people and government policies and international negotiations, and received public funding.

60. The second priority was international migration. The industrialized countries required economic

migration to deal with the challenges arising from demographic change, but they regulated migration in terms of their own economic interests. That one-sided approach, allowing access only to specialized labour, neglected an important source of human capital. Migration should be understood as an opportunity rather than a threat to society. The lack of opportunities in developing countries, exacerbated by the recent crises, had a major impact on young people and children and should be given priority on the international youth agenda.

61. The third priority was sustainable development and, in that regard, the role played by civil society had increased significantly since the 1992 Rio Summit, especially through volunteer programmes. The private sector also had a role to play and should be obliged to implement sustainable development standards at all levels, including fair labour standards. Nevertheless, such efforts could only be successful if politicians set the right course.

62. Young people demanded a comprehensive view of policies, rather than a perspective limited to the next elections. Furthermore, education, both formal and informal, for sustainable development was a key element in generating awareness and changing attitudes. Current political decisions would shape the world in which today's youth would become tomorrow's adults; accordingly, their increased participation was needed.

63. **Mr. Benmehidi** (Algeria) said that the effects of the recent crises continued to have a significant impact on the achievement of the international social development goals. People with disabilities, most of whom lived in the developing world, had been particularly affected by that situation. Priority should also be given to the protection of older persons. Algeria welcomed the action taken by the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing established for the purpose of strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons. It also supported the need to implement a global strategy to promote youth employment.

64. The impact of pandemics, unemployment and the increased cost of food on the economies of African countries had been extremely negative and required urgent action by the international community to ensure that the encouraging progress made by the region in recent years was not jeopardized. The Algerian Government had adopted a series of structural social and economic reforms designed to promote economic development and preserve social cohesion, while ensuring an equitable distribution of the national budget. The results had been a significant increase in per capita GNP, accompanied by a major reduction in poverty and unemployment. In addition, the percentage of the national budget dedicated to social expenditure had increased considerably in recent years, with special attention provided to vulnerable groups.

65. **Mr. Selleslaghs** (Belgium), speaking as a youth delegate, said that social and youth programmes were the first to suffer when Governments took austerity measures and that, by failing to invest in the future, they were creating a talent deficit. In that regard, financial institutions should review their lending conditions to allow the young to invest in their education and other opportunities. Young people were willing to assume their responsibility to help find solutions to the crises, but their rights to education, employment, housing, health care and credit should be ensured. Only then could youth enjoy one of its most important rights: the right to be young and not to worry about the future.

66. **Ms. Maillart** (Belgium), speaking as a youth delegate, said that young people considered that sustainable development was the solution to the crises, yet Governments had reduced investments in that area. Youth participation at all stages of decision-making and in a wide variety of fields from environmental negotiations to labour regulation discussions was absolutely necessary. Young people could come up with fresh, creative and sustainable solutions to current problems.

67. **Ms. El-Batnigi** (Austria), speaking as a youth delegate, said that the economic crisis had affected youth at an individual level, owing to rising levels of unemployment and competition in the labour market, and also at an institutional level because, in many countries, budget cuts had affected investment in young people. When States were confronted with enormous pressure on public spending, dialogue and accountability towards all groups was of utmost importance.

68. In that complex environment, special attention must be paid to the needs of vulnerable groups, such as girls and young women and young people with disabilities, to increase their opportunities for education and provide them with equal access to full

employment. However, tools were required to monitor such efforts at all levels, in order to identify sustainable solutions.

69. Over the past year, young Europeans had been trying to obtain increased recognition for their voluntary activities as an important contribution to non-formal education. At the policy level, they were urging the promotion of citizenship education, opportunities for young people to participate in relevant decision-making processes, increased efforts to mainstream youth issues into other policy areas, and clear coordination of cross-sectoral efforts.

70. **Mr. Abdullah** (Malaysia) said that, while some progress had been made in implementing the commitments assumed at the World Summit for Social Development, achievements remained hostage to current market instability and the fuel and food crises, which at times derailed the main national policy efforts needed to achieve long-lasting social development. Malaysia had formulated a specific policy and national plan of action for people with disabilities based on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Furthermore, the roles and functions of the family had become central to the national development agenda. A national family policy had been devised, and his country hoped to incorporate family well-being, based on universal and multicultural values, into all family development programmes.

71. Malaysia was one of the first States to formulate a national youth policy encompassing youth empowerment, education and training, leadership, and enterprise development. It was also one of the first countries in the Asia-Pacific region to have a policy for older persons that aimed to ensure their social status, dignity and well-being. Lastly, the prime motivator of the Government's efforts remained the well-being of members of Malaysian society, through the promotion of equal opportunities and full participation.

72. **Ms. Böling** (Finland), speaking as a youth delegate, said that, since the majority of the world's youth lived in developing countries, lack of progress regarding development and equal opportunities had a significant impact on the young. Education was a key factor in the creation of sustainable social development, and, although progress had been made in achieving the respective Millennium Development Goal, it had been uneven and adversely affected by the economic and financial crises.

73. Nevertheless, investing in education at all levels was investment in sustainable growth. That was more important than ever, because empowering young people and ensuring that they possessed appropriate skills to gain access to decent work was an important component of development. Eliminating school fees for both primary and secondary education was a way to increase access to education; but gender disparities also needed to be overcome in order to promote equality in society. Today's education system created the society of tomorrow. Consequently human rights, gender equality and peace should be core values of education, while racism and xenophobia needed to be eliminated at all levels.

74. Non-formal education remained an integral and important part of education especially regarding the civic engagement of young people. Finland considered that a strong young civil society helped prevent marginalization and polarization among youth. Young people should be allowed to take part in the decision-making process with regard to education and educational systems. Moreover, giving young people opportunities ensured sustainable and peaceful development. Education was a right that society could not afford to deny.

75. **Ms. Shestack Phipps** (United States of America) said that it was crucial to create jobs for youth so that they could fulfil their potential and contribute to solutions. The desire of young people for political freedom and economic opportunity was playing a significant role in the ongoing social and political transformations across North Africa and the Middle East.

76. Education was a fundamental factor for social development and access to employment. Earlier in the year, the Government had launched its new international education strategy with components relating to all levels of education and training, as well as increased access for vulnerable groups. In addition, over the last 15 years, the United States had provided funds to combat the worst forms of child labour throughout the world, offering relevant education and training opportunities to young people rescued from exploitation.

77. That ambitious agenda reflected the principle that all children should have access to quality education, and that schooling should be relevant to a rapidly changing global job market. At the same time, her

country recognized that partnerships were increasingly important to securing the promise of education for all, and it was also working to elevate youth engagement at the United Nations. The Government also had specific programmes under the Older Americans Act aimed at keeping the members of that community independent and healthy and promoting access and inclusion for people with disabilities.

78. The United States would continue to work with other key partners, including the United Nations and its specialized agencies, to promote social development, protect the most vulnerable in society, reduce poverty and increase social inclusion, moving towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.